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## The Concept of Empire in the Elizabethan Literature: Reading Persia in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Plays*

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### Abstract

The Elizabethan literature was fascinated by the representations of ancient and contemporary Persian Empire, as well as the figures like Cyrus the Great. The main historical sources about Persia that the English writers used, beside the Old Testament, were the writings of Xenophon and Herodotus. However, it was Xenophon that caught the attention of two prominent Elizabethan: Sir Philip Sidney and Christopher Marlowe. Their use of Persian images and figures in their texts was as an act of opposition to the Tudor foreign policy that supported Anglo-Ottoman ties in the 1570s and 1580s. The researchers, therefore, aim to analyse the anti-Ottoman discourse by using Persian Empire and identity in Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* plays (1590) by applying comparative analysis and close reading. The researchers, moreover, explore the way in which the Sidney's and Marlowe's aesthetic engagements aim at the initiation of the project of English empire-building based upon the Achaemenid and Safavid Persia along with representation of Persians as an imaginatively alternative self for the English people.

**Key words:** Persia; Empire; Cyrus; Philip Sidney; Christopher Marlowe; Elizabethan Literature

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### INTRODUCTION

Before the foundation of East India Company in 1600, there was not much trading exchange between the Tudor England and the Persian Safavid Empire (1501-1736). The interest in having trade with Persia, as Newman (2009) puts it, was largely due to the authority of Shah Abbas I (1571-1629), one of the most powerful kings in Persian history, and his successful campaigns against the Ottoman Empire's invasions. However, England's position in this case was rather different. Elizabeth I was more interested in having military and economic ties with the Islamic Ottoman Empire, and the establishment of the Anglo-Ottoman trade in 1581 was a case in point. The dialect of Tudor State and its society, nevertheless, proved to be contradictory. Dimmock (2010) notes that the Tudor authorities and statesmen seriously attempted to "seek the alliance with the Ottoman Empire and later with the kingdom of Morocco" (2010, p.51), because the protestant England was repeatedly threatened with punitive raid by the Catholic Europe, particularly by Philip II of Spain.

English writers, however, pursued different course in their literary texts. They aimed at misrepresentations of the Ottoman Turks, especially notable playwrights such as Marlowe and Shakespeare staged demonised Turks to be confronted immediately. Due to the number of plays about the Turks which were composed from the reign of Elizabeth I to James I, as Grogan (2014) points out, "the early modern genre of the 'Turk' or 'Turkish' play" was popularised and used regularly (2014, p.112). In reality, the English people had contacts with the Ottoman Turks, many of whom came to visit frequently London and other important places of England for diplomatic and commercial reasons. Matar (1999) maintains that these regular contacts resulted in the development of a kind of love-hate relationship with the Turks and other non-Europeans; sometimes, they were admired or subjected to hatred (1999, p.6). In Loomba's view (2003), most of the European nations viewed the Ottomans "with a great

deal of anxiety" (2003, p.159), just at the same time that Elizabeth I and her subordinate authorities attempted to forge alliance with that Islamic Empire.

As a means of resistance to such alliance, and also as a proposed model for the concept of empire-building in England, the early modern English writers generated aesthetic representations of the Persian Empire and figures in their works, notably ancient monarchs such as Cyrus the Great (600-530 BC) and Darius I (550-486 BC). Striking examples are Thomas Preston's tragic play *Cambyzes* (1570), Richard Farrant's *The Warres of Cyrus* (c. 1570s), Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (c. 1579/1580), and Christopher Marlowe's two-part *Tamburlaine the Great* plays (c. 1587-8). Owing to the fact that the Elizabethan contact with Persia was not as frequent as of the Turks in sixteenth-century, the eastern country was regarded as a "romantic past" and fascination (Grogan, 2014, p.2). It is important to note that the positive representation of Persian monarchs such as Cyrus, Darius and Queen Esther in the Old Testament – along with the gallantry and prowess of the Persians, the vast territorial dominance of ancient Persia, for example, "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth" (2 Chronicles 36: 23, The New Oxford Annotated Bible) – had considerable influence over the English Renaissance understanding of that empire and the use of Persian *topoi* in imaginative writings. Most assuredly, the other classical text which diffused the idea of Persian in the Elizabethan literary writing was Xenophon's *Cryopaedia* or *The Education of Cyrus* (370 BC) – the fictional biographical account of Cyrus the Great. Of the importance of this classical text for the English writers, Shepherd (1973, p.4) contends that Xenophon's writing was regarded as a rich source of Persian reference and of humanistic education in the early modern period.

The representations of Persia in the Elizabethan literary writing, particularly between 1560s and 1580s, were also influenced by the news of the authority of the Islamic Safavid. Katouzian (2003) observes that the Persian empires of "Achaemenid, Sassanian and Safavid" had centralised state control (2003, p.51), which fully contributed to the stability of social, economic and political orders. As a Shiite power, the Safavid dynasty was in direct opposition to the Sunni Ottoman Turks. For the Elizabethans, the Safavid Persia was regarded as the revival of the ancient Cyrus' Achaemenid Empire, especially in terms of strong leadership and territorial sovereignty. As Roemer (2006) puts it, "the historical achievement of the Safavids was to establish a strong, enduring state in Iran after centuries of foreign rule and a lengthy period of political fragmentation" (2006, p.189). The Persians, whether the Zoroastrian or Islamic in religious faith, acquired considerable kudos in the Elizabethan literature, and hence were viewed as the imaginary alternative self for the Elizabethans.

Taken as a whole, the aesthetic use of Persian Empire and its important figures such as Cyrus the Great in the early modern writing, and under the influence of Xenophon's *Cryopaedia*, serves dual purposes: an act of opposition to Anglo-Ottoman trading ties in the second half of the sixteenth-century, and creation of fictional embodiment of self for the Elizabethans whom aspired to become an imperial power in the Catholic Europe. In this regard, Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays are explored in this study by using close reading and comparative analysis to understand different uses of Persian *topoi* in the Elizabethan literary writing. Sidney by appropriating Xenophon's Cyrus maneuvers on the concept of humanistic education and the way in which poets can be influential and determining in educating ideal princes. For him, this education is the basis of running an empire. In similar fashion, Marlowe's two-part plays stage a Cyrus-like Tamburlaine's rise to power, and engage in the conceptualisation of empire and imperial authority. Like Sidney, the noticeable impact of Xenophon's *Cryopaedia* can be seen in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays.

## 1. CYRUS AND POETICAL EDUCATION IN SIDNEY'S AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

Sir Philip Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetry* probably in 1579 or 1580 as a response to Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579) which showed contempt for contemporary poetry and drama. However, Sidney's work aims to pursue multiple purposes: it can be read as a manifesto for Renaissance humanism: it defends the dignity of poetry, and highlights poetry's educational value in training an ideal prince. In order to fulfil his goals, the best text that Sidney used was Xenophon's *Cryopaedia*. In his writing, Xenophon draws attention to the importance of education for nurturing the talents and imperial ambitions of mighty rulers like Cyrus of Persia. Ambler (2001) maintains that Xenophon believes that the question of ruling can be settled by educating a ruler (2001, p.3), and this defines the overall objective of Sidney's *Apology*.

Sidney (1973) begins his text by praising poetry and expressing its superiority over fields of knowledge such as history and philosophy. In his view, poetry defines as "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* – that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight" (1973, p.101). Moreover, Shepherd in his introduction to Sidney's *Apology* writes that, for the Elizabethan courtier, "poet should write for the instruction of his prince" (1973, p.77). This social-political function of poetry is what Sidney echoes from Xenophon to make "many Cyruses" (1973, p.101). His emphasis on the concept of poetic *mimesis* in *Apology* means imitating of Cyrus of Persia.

The Cyrus of Xenophon, and Sidney, is fictional and is quite apart from the actual Cyrus in history. This fiction is the product of a poet's creative imagination to determine its desired outcomes. For both Xenophon and Sidney, to borrow from Kermode (2000), fiction works as a process of sense-making and understanding of wider contexts and perspectives (). Sidney, Alexander (2010) argues, believes that poets should create fictions in order to fulfill the objective of "manipulating the minds and hearts of its readers" (2010, p.352); his aim, then, is to use poetry, a literary fiction, to be productive in larger-scale socio-political ends such as training political leaders. Akin to what Xenophon had understood in his time, Sidney too realises that poets must educate future political leaders whom might be the builders of an English empire. He urges the readers to consider poetry "as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention" (1973, p.125), such as the provision the future empire of England requires the governance of powerful leaders; as a consequence, Xenophon's Cyrus and Virgil's Aeneas are very effective in the concept-making of future leaders: "[...] so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus, so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas" (1973, p.100).

The references to Xenophon, moreover, help Sidney to define poetry for the Renaissance audience. Kinney (2000) contends that Sidney "mixes platonic ideals with an Aristotelian mimesis" (2000, p.9) to convey the political message that by imitation of past writers, as he is making use of Xenophon, the poets must create purposeful fictions and concepts for their society. He then adds that it is not always the matter of rhyming and versing which makes good poetry, but the subject under discussion matters most, that is, the designation of outstanding images for a desired end, for instance, a well-run Empire of Persia. Accordingly, he mentions:

For Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigiemiustiimperii*, the portraiture of a just empire, under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him), made therein an absolute heroical poem. So did Heliodorus in his sugared invention of that picture of love in Theagenes and Chariclea; and yet both these wrote in prose... (1973, p.103)

Due to the fact that Sidney's emphasis is on the poetic education, he avers that the art of poetry is superior to other branches of knowledge like philosophy and history on the grounds that it creates fictions encompassing the factuality of history and ethicality of philosophy simultaneously. In his view, Poetry has a certain freedom that

excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good: which setting forward and moving to well doing indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poet as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable. (1973, p.112)

Sidney, therefore, believes that a poet should find a path to guide a man to virtue as a way of teaching what virtue is, and finally proves the position of poetry beyond the historical and the philosophical.

As Hulse (2000) observes, Sidney regards Ulysses, Aeneas, Cyrus and Darius, cited in his *Apology*, as "ideal" and mighty rulers (2000, p.57); this serves classical period the main sources of educating future English princes. Moreover, these fictional figures are more preferable than factual characters in the work of a historian:

[...] then certainly is more doctrinable the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon than the true Cyrus in Justin, and the feigned Aeneas in Virgil than the right Aeneas in Dares Phrygius....in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed; where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but as in Alexander or Scipio himself show doings, some to be liked, some to be bemisliked. (1973, p.110)

Sidney's emphasis, here, is once again on the efficacy of a literary fiction in the process of concept-making. Given that imitation of the classical writers was part of educational programme in sixteenth-century England, the formation of concepts in regards to history was very important for the Elizabethan writers (Shepherd, 1773, p.31). Sidney engages himself in shaping new understanding of history, more founded on concepts rather than on facts. For him, Xenophon and other classical writers offer fictions to imitate – an imitation that is a necessary condition for framing a concept of English empire run by ideal rulers in the late sixteenth-century.

Overall, the positive image of Cyrus and Persia in the Old Testament might expand the influence of Xenophon's text on Sidney and his peers such as Marlowe. In this respect, Xenophon's positive account of ancient Persia as a nation of wealth and power (2001, p.67) encourages Sidney to dedicate several paragraphs to the significance of imperial virtues such as loyalty and just, and urges him to give the example of Zopyrus, King Darius' faithful servant, and how peoples of remote provinces of the Persian Empire were obedient to Cyrus, though they were in periphery and had never seen their Emperor in person. This sense of loyalty to the ideal ruler is what Sidney takes as the real virtue in the establishment of a given empire.

To summarise, Sidney in *Apology* approaches the making of a concept of empire along with its ideal rulers, and structures his text "around this dialectic structure of the self as other and the other as the self" (Hulse, 2000, p.55). For him, a Persian is the imaginary other self of an English, and in the land of Persia you may "hear the right description of wisdom, valor, and justice" (1973, p.114). His concept of an English empire requires powerful leaders to run it, based on the model of Cyrus and later Darius I. in this way, the responsibility of poets is to educate the future political leaders, and their work is far superior to any work carried out by historians and philosophers. In the subsequent section, the concept of empire and its leader, a Cyrus-like king as Tamburlaine, in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays will be explored.



## 2. TAMBURLAINE'S COUP AND EMPIRE-BUILDING IN MARLOWE'S TAMBURLAINE

Christopher Marlowe's two parts *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590) is a meeting ground for both Xenophon's praise for Cyrus and Persian way of governing the entire empire. Broadly speaking, it can be said that the characterisation of Tamburlaine is largely based on Xenophon's Cyrus; with the difference that Marlowe considers Herodotus' negative view of Cyrus and the Persian Empire in as well, particularly in *part Two*. Sidney's Persian appropriation focuses on the matter of poetical education and its instrumentality in making a ruler ideal, whereas Marlowe's relates to the concept of empire, and thus encourages the Elizabethans to contemplate on Tamburlaine's strong will and imperial ambitions that would finally lead to imperial conquest.

Strikingly, *Tamburlaine* plays mention more than 50 geographical names of the Orient and northern Africa, which demonstrates the Elizabethan thirst for discovering remote and exotic places. It also, Sullivan (2004) argues, reflects the idea of 'new geography' of the late sixteenth-century that is a kind of imaginatively "mythopoetic geography" (2004, p.232). *Tamburlaine* plays put forward the notion that discovering and dominating unknown, faraway places can be done by colonial expansion. Like Sidney, Marlowe shows interest in Persian theme. In the opening lines of the first part of *Tamburlaine*, Cosroe, the brother of king Mycetes of Persia, laments the present condition of Persian Empire, and speaks highly of the glory and vastness of the ancient Persia:

Unhappy Persia – that in former age  
Has been the seat of mighty conquerors,  
That, in their prowess and their policies,  
Have triumph'd over Afric, and the bounds  
Of Europe where the sun dares scarce appear  
For freezing meteors and congealed cold –  
(1 Tamb. 1.1. 6-11)

Threatened by Tamburlaine's victory and conquest, the Persian monarch Mycetes lacks the power of speech and courage to encounter the Scythian shepherd, and his treacherous brother starts to speak for him. However, Marlowe does not aim to articulate the fall of Persian Empire by the hand of Tamburlaine; rather, Marlowe stages the fall of a weak monarch and the birth of a mighty king such as Tamburlaine. In fact, Tamburlaine mounts a coup d'état against the central power, since he is from Scythia, a peripheral vast region located in the north of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC). Van de Microop (2016, p.292-3) notes that alongside of Persians, the Scythians, the Medes, and other ethnicities were responsible for the establishment of the first powerful Persian Empire in 550 BC.

To a certain degree, Tamburlaine resembles Cyrus

of Xenophon's in that both monarchs were raised by the shepherd families, and both were risen to power almost from nothing. Tamburlaine's shepherd identity is what Marlowe uses as the deconstruction of the Elizabethan order of hierarchy and high birth. As stated by Xenophon, Cyrus pursued the policy of merit-based appreciation of awarding and personal achievement (2001, p.71). He was raised by the shepherds, later he became the strongest and the most influential Achaemenid emperor in the middle of sixth-century BC. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, in a similar manner, is very proud of his Scythian shepherd background and his great ambition and will assist him to seize the Persian throne and other regions of the Orient and northern Africa. Throughout the two parts, Tamburlaine places emphasis on his identity as a Persian King and a shepherd. Even in his marching to various lands far from the centre of his empire, he longs for marching to Persia once more. Persia is the centre, and his Persian identity is what he never loses in his imperial conquests.

The first part of *Tamburlaine* can be divided into two main parts of Persia and Ottoman. The first half of the play deals with the way in which Tamburlaine comes to power and conquers Persia, as well as staging the futile effort of Persian aristocrats such as Mycetes and Cosroe to resist Tamburlaine's power. References to Persian wealth, vastness, and prominent monarchs – such as "Cyrus" and "great Darius" (1 Tamb. 1.1. 130, 154) – can be seen on and on in the first part of the play. It was common to Renaissance writers to allude to the wealth of Persia in their works because of the references of the Old Testament and classical Greek texts such as Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. As an illustration, Edmund Spencer's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) has several lines indicating "The wealth of th' East, and pompe of Persian kings; / Gold, amber, yvorie, perles, owches, rings, / And all that els was pretious and deare" (III. iv. v23).

Tamburlaine's conversation with the Persian king Mycetes is witty and respectful, unlike his deep contempt for Bajazeth, the Turkish Emperor; his extraordinary power of articulation wins him the submission of the dispatched Persian troops without bloodshed, and as the Persian Theridamas attests: "Won with thy words, and conquer'd with thy looks, / I yield myself, my men, and horse to thee / To be partaker of thy good or ill, / As long as life maintains Theridamas" (1 Tamb. 1.2. 228-31). Almost all of Marlowe's references to Persia connote to ancient Persia, not the contemporary Islamic Safavid. He represents the pre-Islamic Persia. Although, historically, ancient Persia was Zoroastrian, the Persia in *Tamburlaine* displays a sense of paganism. In the second half of *Part One*, Marlowe associates Islam with the Turks, and Tamburlaine many times attack Mahoment, the prophet that Bajazeth believes in him. As a result, Tamburlaine's identity as a Persian stands against the Islamic identity of the Ottomans, Bajazeth and his wife Zabina. The

play's anti-Turk discourse is developed through the Persian identity of Tamburlaine. At this point, the play shows the intersection of the classical Achaemenid and contemporary Safavid Persia (Grogan, 2014, p. 126).

As discussed earlier, the Tudor policy was to cement diplomatic ties with the Ottomans in the hope of the aids that this Islamic empire might provide for the Elizabethans in their fight against the Catholic Europe. Aesthetically, Marlowe, Sidney, and several of their peers reject this policy by offering an alternative: Persia as the imaginary embodiment of England. Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* plays lauds the concept of empire, and shows the way in which a mighty leader such as Tamburlaine can build an empire that aims to end the "menace" of the neighbouring Turks (*1 Tamb.* 3.2.4). In his view, Persia can be a suitable alternative for forging diplomatic-military ties with because, whether its ancient era or contemporary, this empire is always great, and hence it is the best option to use for the formation of the concept of an English empire. In terms of Elizabethan concept-making, Shepherd observes that there was a profound "interest in the process of thinking, in mental analysis, in biography and autobiography" in the Elizabethan England (1973, p.22). The reason was simply that the Elizabethan England, as a protestant nation in the Catholic world, must define her own identity, culture and history. Concept-making and rewriting history from new perspectives and attitudes were two main tasks that Elizabethan writers would like to perform in their literary texts.

As a common theme in the Elizabethan drama, demonisation of the Ottoman Turks in *Tamburlaine* Plays, politically speaking, in addition to its being a challenge to the foreign policy of the Tudor State, it indicates the religious conflict between the Turks and the Persians. In terms of the Islamic belief, the Turks are Sunni, the Persians are Shiite. Quite similar to the Elizabethans, the Persians were a minority in the Sunni Middle East, and Marlowe makes use of this fact to liken the situation of England to Persia; as a result, Persia has much in common with the Elizabethan England on account of its Protestant belief which resulted in the isolation of the country in the Catholic Europe (Dimmock, 2005, p.18).

The first part of *Tamburlaine* represents two opposing religious nations, the Ottomans and the Persians, and shows the defeat of the former. The play stages that the Ottomans have marched successfully to Europe, yet defeated by the military might of Tamburlaine. Historically, Shah Abbas I of Persia was the most powerful Safavid monarch who reconquered those provinces of Persia occupied by the Ottoman Turks and the Uzbeks in the 1570s and 1580s. After his coronation in 1588, Shah Abbas I defeated the Turks several times, which finally resulted in the heavy defeat of the Ottomans in 1618 and the humiliation of their monarch Sultan Ahmed I (1590-1617). For Marlowe, both the ancient and contemporary Safavid Persia is a fascination, an excellent

model for the conceptualisation of English empire. In the third act of *Part One*, Tamburlaine defeats the Turkish Emperor Bajazeth, and imprisons him along with his wife Zabina. Tamburlaine disdains Bajazeth and Zabina, turns the Emperor to his foot stool, before they commit suicide at the end. Tamburlaine, then, successfully conquers Damascus, the motherland of his beloved princess Zenocrate, who at the close of the first part, is crowned by Tamburlaine as the "Queen of Persia" (*1 Tamb.* 5.2. 445). The play ends with Tamburlaine and Zenocrate's marriage ceremony.

## 2.1 The Immortal Tamburlaine: Reading *Part Two*

The first part of *Tamburlaine* stages how Tamburlaine – the self-claimed "the scourge and wrath of God" (*1 Tamb.* 3.3.44) – seizes the power in coup d'état against the Persian king Mycetes and his later victories over the Turks. However, *Part Two* is different with *Part One* in that the enemies of Tamburlaine have now grown by number and the survived son of Bajazeth, Callapine, which according to Burnett (2004), resembles Tamburlaine in using his elocution and persuasion to charm "his position" (2004, p.128), gather an army, and take vengeance. Whilst Tamburlaine's speech and action are dominant in *Part One*, the rise of other Tamburlaine-like figures is staged in *Part Two*. The second part of *Tamburlaine*, as well as the characterisation of the protagonist based on Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, stages that the infallibility of Tamburlaine gives birth to other Tamburlaine-like princes such as Callapine.

Like Sidney's emphasis upon the poets' task of educating political leaders, Tamburlaine too trains his three sons to prepare them for future leadership. He bequeaths his high imperial ambitions to his sons, and advises them to be "all a scourge and terror to the world, / Or else, you are not sons of Tamburlaine" (*2 Tamb.* 1.4. 63-4). In the course of his education, Tamburlaine gives a long speech to his sons and cuts his arm as an act of valour expressing that "Blood is the god of war's rich livery" (*2 Tamb.* 3.2. 116), and the sons eagerly ask the father to give them the similar wound, with the exception of his eldest son, Calyphas, tending to avoid violence and death in the battlefield. Burnett points out that Calyphas is a threat to Tamburlaine's grand scheme of colonial expansion because he destabilises the system that Tamburlaine has tried had to create (2004, p.138). Calyphas prefers to be like his mother Zenocrate abstemious; for this reason, and also for his refusal to join his brothers in the battlefield, he is killed by his wrathful father.

Marlowe's play, like Sidney's *Apology*, highlights the importance of education for training future princes, especially the educator is a Cyrus-like emperor; thus, for Marlowe, the following lines from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* becomes practicable:

this man [Cyrus] was worthy of wonder, we examined who he was by birth, what his nature was, and with what education

he was brought up, such that he so excelled in ruling human beings. Whatever we have learned, therefore, and think we have perceived about him, we shall try to relate. (2001, p.23)

About the personal education of Tamburlaine nothing is said in both parts, yet Tamburlaine is very keen on educating the sons to inherit his vast empire. As expected, after the death of Tamburlaine, the sons become the monarchs of the empire.

Although, the Tamburlaine of *Part two* faces grave difficulties such as Zenocrate's death and the formation of a league against him by Callapine, he frustrates his enemies repeatedly by his territorial ambitions, and by spreading loyalty and courage among his subordinates. He defeats the kings challenging his throne, and forces them to carry his chariot. The death of Zenocrate is one of the turning points of the play affecting Tamburlaine deeply, in a way that he reveals excessive violence towards his enemies, such as the massacre of Babylonians, and shows disrespect to Muslims by burning their Quran. This is the point where Marlowe parts with Xenophon because the age of Marlowe was a period of religious, military and political conflicts, and violence was the common discourse of the day. While the Greek historian's text is an encomium of Cyrus, Marlowe criticises Tamburlaine's *hubris* and violent conduct, as Balot (2001) notes, approaching him closer to Herodotus' dissenting view of imperial expansionism, particularly the one related to the Persian Empire, and describing Cyrus as a *hubristic* emperor (2001, p.92). However, Herodotus' anti-Persian attitude was to a large extent due to the Persian invasions of Greece in the fifth-century BC.

Tamburlaine's conquest of Babylon in the fifth act is a reference to the historical expedition of Cyrus to Babylon in 539 BC, resulted in the introduction of the city as another province of Achaemenid Empire. Tamburlaine's Quran-burning and his opposition to Mahomet, while it is true that in several sources these acts are interpreted as the schism between Shia and Sunni Muslims (Dimmock, 2005; Grogan, 2014), it can be said that Marlowe considers the clash between pre-Islamic Persia (officially Zoroastrian in religion) and the Islamic tradition. The evidence is that nowhere in the two parts can be found any reference to Islamic Persia. Notably, *Tamburlaine* dramatises the long feud between Zoroastrian Persians and the Muslim Arabs in Arab conquest of Persia in 633 AD, led to the fall of the Sasanian Empire (224-651 AD).

As mentioned earlier, *Tamburlaine* plays associate Islam with the Turks, whom are portrayed by Marlowe as weak believers, like Bajazeth and Zabina's curse on their prophet Mahomet:

BAJAZETH	Ah, villains, dare you touch my sacred arms? O Mahomet! O sleepy Mahomet!
ZABINA	O cursed Mahomet, that mak'st us thus The slaves to Scythians rude and barbarous! ( <i>1 Tamb.</i> 3.3. 268-71)

In this regard, as White (2004, p.70) puts it,

*Tamburlaine* plays are about secularism and the weakness of faith, as articulated in the case of Bajazeth, who at first was a staunch believer of Mahomet.

Finally, Tamburlaine's natural death makes him untouched and god-like at the end of the play; none of his foes could defeat him in the battle, and the nature ultimately conquers him. His death also resembles the death of the historical Cyrus. The death of Cyrus was narrated by the Greek historians, and there can be found no Persian historical text in this regard. According to Herodotus, Cyrus was killed in the battle against the Massageteans, who were nomadic people inhabited the central Asia. On the other hand, Xenophon narrates that Cyrus died of natural death, and his body carried back to Persia where he was mummified and buried in Pasargadae to date. It is the second account that Marlowe puts to use in his play.

Briefly speaking, *Tamburlaine* is the drama about "power, wealth and excess" (Smith, 2000, p.5). The play suggests to become a powerful empire might secure and strengthen England's position in the Catholic Europe. Marlowe's two-part plays characterises Tamburlaine based on Xenophon's account of Cyrus the Great, and the hostility between the Persians and Ottoman Turks links them with the idea that Persians are the imaginary embodiments of the Elizabethans encountering the threats of Spain and other Catholic nations, just quite akin to Safavid Persia, the only Shiite state among the Sunni nations of the Middle East that was threatened or invaded by the Ottomans from time to time. Marlowe's Persia becomes an appropriate model for the project of empire-building in England.

## CONCLUSION

There was an interest among the Elizabethan authors in persianising their literary works for three main objectives. Firstly, they were able to express their dissenting view on the establishment of Anglo-Ottoman trade in the early 1580s, and the earlier military-economic ties with that Islamic empire. Secondly, whether the ancient Achaemenid or contemporary Safavid, the Persian Empire was taken as the perfect vehicle for the project of English empire-building. The English Renaissance writers aimed to develop a conception of empire by using classical sources such as the Old Testament and Greek historiographical writings on Persia; in this regard, the Greek historian Xenophon's fictional account of Cyrus the Great *Cyropaedia* (or *The Education of Cyrus*) gained special prominence. Finally, this zeal for building an English empire was also due to the threats of Catholic Churchill, the Spanish Empire particularly.

The positive representation of Cyrus, and Persians in general, exerted great impact on Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (probably written in 1579 or 1580, published posthumously in 1595) and Christopher



Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays (1590) in which they considered Persia as imaginary embodiment of self, and modeled Persian Empire for their concept of English empire, later fulfilled in the nineteenth-century. For many Elizabethans, the Safavid Persia was the revival of the Achaemenid Empire and its Shah Abbas was also compared to Cyrus the Great on the grounds of popularity and authority.

Sidney argues that poets should write for the instruction of princes to be ideal rulers like Cyrus of Persia. Sydney follows Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in the matter of education by poetry, and he echoes the Greek historian in his text from time to time. In Sydney's view, a just and powerful empire, such as the Achaemenid Empire under the reign of Cyrus, needs to a model for an English empire. Sidney also believes that poetry is superior to history and philosophy; although all the three can reach virtue, poetry can do this at its best by teaching how to be like a hero such as the one in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In brief, Sidney's political discussion is that, quite similar to Xenophon, it is essential to train powerful leaders to run an empire.

Marlowe, too, in *Tamburlaine* plays stages a Cyrus-like Tamburlaine based on Xenophon and partly on Herodotus' *Histories*. Unlike Sidney, Marlowe also represents references to contemporary Islamic Persia in order to show the hostility between the Persians and Ottoman Turks, which makes his two-part plays a meeting ground of classical and contemporary Persia. Marlowe pays more attention to the concept of empire and imperial expansion; his Tamburlaine, in terms of imperial ambitions and power, is akin to Xenophon's account, yet in *Part Two* particularly, his character is portrayed as a ruthless monarch capable of hatred and criticism. For Marlowe, Persia, as well as being a model for an English empire, it resembles the Protestant England in a way that Safavid Persia is the only Shiite state among the Sunni nations. Broadly speaking, both Marlowe and Sidney take Persia as the fictional other of England to promote the idea that Persians are imaginary English selves, as opposed to Tudor foreign policy that forged economic, diplomat and military ties with the Ottoman Empire.

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